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DEPARTMENT OF NURSING EDUCATION

IN CHARGE OF

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POSSIBLE CHANGES TO MEET THE WAR EMERGENCY

When the war brought us face to face with the problem of supplying some thousands of trained nurses for army and navy service, we knew at once that we should have substantially to increase our nursing forces, or fail the country in its hour of need. Two alternatives presented themselves. Either we must dilute our professional personnel by introducing a fairly large body of untrained workers into military hospitals and accept the lowering of professional standards which this policy would entail, or we must start in at once to produce trained workers at a much more rapid rate than had usually been considered possible.

Other professions faced with the same problems—medicine, engineering, the army and the navy, and all kinds of commercial and industrial occupations—are meeting the situation in different ways. Medical colleges are proposing to put in three additional summer terms so as to graduate students a year earlier than usual. Some universities are accepting military service instead of the final year of college work. Some high schools are releasing their students for agricultural service and giving them credit for it. Certain occupations have accepted the makeshift of the temporary untrained worker, and others were obliged to shorten the regular period of training and rush workers into the field half-trained, while still others have compromised by cutting out more or less nonessential parts of the training and speeding up the rest through intensive, well directed work. Where it was possible to secure a group of picked students with good fundamental preparation, surprising results have frequently been obtained by the latter method. Part of the success is doubtless due to the spur of war enthusiasm and the consciousness of the nation's urgent need, but especially in the army, authorities seem to agree that it has also been due to new methods of training, involving the scrapping of some established traditions and the reconstruction of some fundamental theories of military education.

It seems probable that nursing education will also undergo some modifications as a result of the experiences we are going through in our effort to meet the exceptional demands of the war situation. Fortunately, in nursing we had at our disposal large enough forces of trained women to meet all immediate needs, so it has not been

necessary as yet to resort to the use of untrained workers or to compromise on half-trained workers. Under the leadership of the National Committee on Nursing, various measures were at once introduced to speed up the training and increase the total output of graduate nurses: (1) by enlarging the regular classes entering training schools; (2) by bringing in extra summer groups; (3) by admitting nonresident students; (4) by shortening the training somewhat for especially qualified students (college graduates); and (5) by drafting more senior students for training in visiting nursing and other special branches and thus providing accommodation for more pupils in the training schools.

As a result of these measures the number of pupils entering schools of nursing during this past year, according to statistics from over 700 schools, has increased by about 25 per cent. This means that instead of a yearly output of between twelve and fifteen thousand graduate nurses, we will have, roughly, from fifteen to eighteen thousand available in 1919 and 1920. We do not know how many of the pupils entering last summer came in on the two years and three months' basis, but it is probable that an appreciable number of these will be ready in the fall of 1919 to increase further the usual yearly output.

As an additional measure for meeting any urgent demands in the meantime, the National Committee on Nursing is proposing that senior pupil nurses from three-year schools be allowed to graduate six months earlier on condition that they enroll at once for war service in connection with Army, Navy or Red Cross hospitals. Thus, by drawing off the relatively skilled workers from the top and filling in more recruits from the bottom, the hospital training schools should be able to keep up the necessary supply of trained workers, both for civilian and military hospitals until the larger classes begin to graduate.

In order that the pupils may not suffer seriously from this possible shortening of their training and that they may be able to qualify fully for registration, it will be necessary to go very carefully over the ground of both their theoretical and practical work to see what we can do to speed up the training and to give it the maximum of educational value and productiveness.

We know that some parts of the practical work can be eliminated or cut down without any great loss to the students. Much of the routine household work, dusting, cleaning, folding linen, setting trays, etc., might very well be turned over to domestic employees after the pupil has shown that she has mastered the principles and the method. The period in the surgical supply room can usually be greatly reduced

to allow for more actual work with patients. Night duty and service in the private wards, which is relatively less instructive than day duty on the big open wards, should be reduced to the lowest possible minimum.

The suggestion which has been made that pupil nurses should be used more extensively as special nurses for private patients in order that more graduate nurses might be released for war service, would be most unfair to the pupils, since it would deprive them of the richer and more intensive experience with a larger variety of patients in the more active departments of the hospital. It would be especially unfortunate to increase the work with private patients which is already much too extensive in most hospitals, if the training is to be shortened in any way. Private patients will have to learn to do with less "specialing" than they have been accustomed to. Indeed, it is evident already that owing to patriotism or enforced economy, fewer special nurses or "luxury" nurses are now being employed than formerly, a decidedly wholesome change which it is hoped the hospitals will encourage.

On the other hand, many schools are beginning to accept the idea that it is not absolutely necessary for every pupil to have a period of practical experience in every hospital department. It is obvious that for a nurse who expects to do public health work a period in the dispensary is more profitable than a period in the operating room, and a period of visiting nursing might well replace some of the accepted work in the medical or surgical wards.

The emphasis on different parts of the training is also changing. The importance of mental and contagious work is being more and more urged by public health workers especially, and everyone agrees that more time in the general course should be given to obstetrical and children's nursing. Administrative work, however, is not necessarily a part of hospital training. It is usually introduced for economy and for the convenience of the hospital, and it should certainly be omitted if the period of training is to be reduced.

In regard to the theoretical work, this is already so inadequate in many schools that it would be most unfortunate to reduce it for any group of pupils. Since many training schools will be accepting some college women on the two-year or two-year-and-three-months' basis, it would seem to be the best plan to begin at once to push the theoretical work forward for all students and to condense into the first two years most of the lecture and class work usually given in the three years. This would make it easier to release pupils in the third year, if it should prove necessary, and would facilitate the arrange-

ment for special training in affiliating hospitals and visiting nurse associations in the third year.

The Regents in the State of New York have already signified their willingness to allow pupils to take the regents examinations six months before graduation in order that they may be released for military service, if necessary, and they may in that case have the full status of graduate registered nurses. Other states will undoubtedly be willing to allow similar concessions.

The one great difficulty which is being met in many states is the law governing registration. Where the law states definitely, as it does in about eighteen states, that the course of training in registered schools must be three years, and that this period of time must be spent within the hospital, it is obviously impossible for any hospital in that state to offer to reduce the regular course for college graduates or to release third year students for any portion of the course.

The following extracts from the laws of two of these states will show what the problem is:

California.—"An accredited training school for nurses within the meaning of this act is hereby defined to be a school for the training of nurses attached to or operated in connection with a hospital or hospitals giving a general training and systematic theoretical and practical course of instruction covering a period of at least three years."

Maryland.—"Each applicant shall furnish evidence satisfactory to said Board of Examiners that he or she has graduated from a training school connected with a general hospital where three years of training with a systematic course of instruction is given in the hospital."

No one would for a moment suggest the advisability of breaking down a three-year law and substituting a two-year law for it, or even of suspending it for the duration of the war. Indeed, such an emergency measure could not be put through at the present time. But it would be possible to offer such an amendment to the law, as would allow greater flexibility of application and more liberal interpretation of its requirements. Instead of the three full years of training in a hospital, it would be possible to allow some portion of this time to be spent in preparation in an approved college or technical school or in special training for public health nursing or social service or in service in military hospitals, in time of war. In allowing for this freer interpretation of the three-year law, we would not be breaking down standards of nursing education, but would rather be providing for certain developments in our present system which would not be possible otherwise.

There has been an increasing tendency in the past few years to turn over some portion of the preliminary preparation of the nurse to colleges or other educational institutions. This seems on the whole

a good thing to encourage and yet the training is not given within the hospital, and very often the student has little or no connection with the hospital during this period. Again, we find several representative schools arranging for special courses in visiting nursing outside of the hospital or for certain courses in an adjacent educational institution during the final year. Within the strict meaning of the laws quoted, any such substitution for the actual work in the hospital wards would be impossible.

There will probably be considerable difference of opinion among training schools regarding the policy of accepting college graduates for a somewhat reduced course of training, but no state would wish definitely to exclude from its schools this better-educated group of applicants. Unfortunately, that is what is happening.

The Vassar College Committee in selecting the group of hospitals to which the students from the summer course will be sent for their two years' training have been obliged to omit the names of a number of the most prominent hospitals in the country because of the compulsory three-year laws in their states. If amendments could be pushed through at once, it might still be possible to make arrangements for some of these well-prepared college women (about 500 are expected) to be admitted to hospitals in those states.

Since there is little doubt that the war will last some time longer, and since every nursing school and every state wants to help in every way possible in meeting the needs of the country, it would seem to be advisable for legislative committees to consider this matter at the earliest possible moment. The need is urgent, and if we cannot adapt our existing machinery to meet it, new measures will be forced upon us from the outside which will be much more difficult to control and which may result in a serious breaking down of our existing standards of nursing.

One of our correspondents writes:

I went into the House of Representatives on Saturday afternoon and heard Nicholas Longworth in a very eloquent speech. The lolling members apparently paid little attention, but a number shook hands with him at its close, so they must have listened. Miss Rankin was in her seat, looking well and behaving well, quite a credit to her state.